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FROM : AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA — 941 DESP. NO.

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SUBJECT: Joint Weeka No. 17 from State, Army and Air for SAA Section I

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PER CHRISMAN OFFICE AKA FADRC FOI CASE NO. 740332

In acknowledging the invitation of the four Central American Foreign Ministers who met in San José on April 16 that Guatemala rejoin the Organization of Central American States (ODECA), Dr. Raúl OSEGUEDA, Guatemala's Foreign Minister, said the invitation merited careful consideration. However the trend of comment in the pro-Government press indicated little liklihood that Guatemala would accept the invitation unless El Salvador's proposal for joint action against Communism was dropped. Domestic tension eased somewhat when creditable reports from Honduras indicated the arrival there of Sr. Juan CORDOVA Cerna, the anti-Communist leader, who was reported to have escaped from the police after being arrested in connection with the abortive Salamá uprising of March 29 and who was widely believed to have been shot or severely mistreated by the authorities.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

In a note dated April 18/19 (according to the local press), Dr. Fernando LARA, Foreign Minister of Costa Rica, transmitted to the Guatemalan Government the text of the "Declaration of San José" signed on April 16 by the Foreign Ministers of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras affirming their intention of continuing in the ODECA and inviting Guatemala to rejoin the Organization. In his reply, Dr. Osegueda thanked Dr. Lara for the invitation and said it merited the careful consideration of the Guatemalan Government.

Although the Foreign Minister's acknowledgement left the door open for a possible return to ODECA, the pro-Government daily Nuestro Diario, which reflects the thought of the extreme leftist groups influential in the Government, stated in an editorial on April 21 that unless Guatemala was convinced that the ODECA would observe the principles of non-intervention and self-determination of peoples, it could not be a member of that organization.

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Since the Guatemalan Government has always held that the Salvadoran proposal for discussing in ODECA joint measures to curb international Communism constituted intervention in its domestic affairs and was essentially a plan to obstruct its social program, Guatemala's return to ODECA appears unlikely unless the Salvadoran proposal is withdrawn.

Meanwhile, Guatemala's efforts to enlist international support for its protest against the inclusion of British Honduras in a proposed British West Indian Federation (Weeka No. 16) met with but a limited response. A message of April 15 from Santiago, Chile signed by Sr. Adolfo TAPIA Moore said that he had been instructed by the Deputies of the Independent Parliamentary Committee to express solidarity with "the democratic regime" of Guatemala but a telegram from the President of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly, Sr. Abelardo BONILLA, said that body could not consider the Guatemalan request since, as it was in special session, it could only take up the matters submitted by the Executive.

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

Reports that Sr. Juan Córdova Cerna, the anti-Communist leader who disappeared on April 13 (Weeka No. 15), had succeeded in crossing the border into Honduras produced a noticeable relaxation in the tense atmosphere which prevailed locally during April. Opposition groups had feared that Sr. Córdova Cerna had either been summarily executed by the police or had been so brutally tortured that the police feared to produce him in court and several local groups, including the Guatemalan Bar Association, had demanded that the authorities produce him.

An earlier statement by Colonel Rogelio CRUZ Wer, Chief of Police, that the principal participants in the Salamá uprising had either been captured or had left the country also contributed to lessening the tension since it was interpreted as meaning that the Government did not intend to make a clean sweep of all anti-Communist leaders, as many had feared. During the week automobiles entering Guatemala City were no longer being searched and the guards at diplomatic missions were reduced to normal proportions.

Meanwhile, the ARBENZ Administration carried forward its plan to revise the Agrarian Reform Law (Weeka No. 13). The Executive transmitted to Congress the proposed amendments to sixteen articles. To speed land distribution, for which labor and farm workers' organizations have been clamoring, it was proposed that Article 74 of the law be changed to permit farm workers to take provisional possession of land expropriated by the National Agrarian Department (DAN) before it

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was surveyed and formally divided among claimants. The local agrarian committees would make provisional distribution. No change was proposed in the composition of the local committees, three of whose five members represent the farm workers' organizations. On the other hand, members nominated by the farm unions would be eliminated from the Departmental (provincial) Agrarian Committees by an amendment to Article 56, thus giving the national agrarian authorities more control over these bodies which are charged with reviewing the decisions of the local committees in expropriation proceedings.

Although the seizure of land by rural laborers without complying with the terms of the Agrarian Law continued despite the warnings of Major Alfonso MARTINEZ, Chief of the DAN (Weeka No. 12), the pace of these lawless acts diminished and there was evidence that officials in Guatemala City were endeavoring to check them. For instance, Sr. Augusto CHARNAUD MacDonald, Minister of Interior, issued orders to all Departmental Governors to see that the local agrarian committees proceeded strictly in conformity with the law and to take "effective steps" to prevent them from exceeding their authority. The committees were to be warned that any violent act would be repressed and the Governors were told to give small and medium landowners their "full support" in carrying on their agricultural activities. Sr. Charnaud MacDonald's instructions to the Governors followed many reports that farm laborers had not only invaded the property of large landowners but had attempted to seize the land of farmers whose holdings were too small to be subject to expropriation.

R. E. Schoenfeld

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cc: C. A. Missions
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